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AN ARMORER'S WORKSHOP

THE visitor to the Riggs gallery, examining a suit of ancient armor, is apt to think rather of the beauty of the object than of the labor and skill of the artist who made it. The armorer, it is clear, encountered many-sided mechanical difficulties in handling his "medium": he could not model steel with the same nicety and fluency with which a

bench. On one side of it is a bench-vise: this dates from the early seventeenth century and is of North Italian workmanship, boldly decorated with foliation and mascarons—a vise which might have been used by an artist who prepared the locks and mountings of the enriched pistols and harquebuses shown in neighboring cases. Here, too, are numerous anvil-like "stakes" which were held in sockets in the bench or when of greater size were thrust into a



"ARMORER'S WORKSHOP," RIGGS GALLERY

brother artist used his paint, clay, wax, wood, silver, or gold. Accordingly, with a view to making clearer the art of armor-making, it has seemed worth while to show to the general visitor some of the special implements or instruments which the armorer employed, and on the west side of the Riggs gallery, framed in splendid Gothic woodwork¹, one may now look at the restoration of an ancient work-

heavy block nearby. Some of these in our restoration are fitted in a block which is known to have served for several generations of armorers. Such stakes show surfaces sometimes flattened, sometimes rounded, sometimes long and developed as prongs,—shapes which were required in the varying processes of modeling plates of steel into subtle curves. Some of the stakes, it appears, were made to penetrate ridges and cavities, as within the crests of helmets; others were arranged to develop the cylindrical elements of armor for arms and legs. Near the present stakes there are exhibited files, punches, and chisels,

¹The rear of the courtyard of an ancient house at Abbeville (early sixteenth century), showing a door and the front of a stairway: also some original panels. The woodwork of the bench is modern.

and patterns for various plates of armor; also matrices by means of which borders were rolled over or pressed into the forms of roping which one sees so frequently in armor of the sixteenth century. These tools, it may be remarked, are in many cases old, some of them dating from the time when armor was made for actual service. The most important object in this little collec-



WISE, NORTH ITALIAN
LENT BY AMBROSE MONELL

tion is an anvil, richly wrought, which dates from the sixteenth century—if not earlier. It is probably of Italian workmanship and, with the neighboring bench-vise, has been borrowed for our present purpose from the collection of Ambrose Monell of Tuxedo. The anvil is boldly modeled, wrought in iron, its upper surface faced with steel; its base is octangular, ornamented with beveled mouldings; its sides are developed in rounded arches, partly by welding in position masses of iron, partly by strenuous chiseling. The

quality of the object suggests that it was used for work of the costliest character, that gold or silver may have been beaten upon it; but its large size, massive construction, and roughly worn and hammered surface indicate altogether that it could not have belonged to a goldsmith. We know, moreover, that anvils of similar shape have been pictured for iron-workers. Thus, one of them appears in a portrait by Hans Memling in the Hôpital Saint Jean in Bruges and two others were painted by Breughel in his *Vulcan's Forge*. So we justly conclude that the present object with its elaborate ornamentation could have been used only by an iron-worker and an iron-worker of quality—which means, in all ancient rules, an armorer.

In addition to anvil, vise, and stakes the visitor sees in our workshop a rack of implements of different sizes and kinds. There are hammers of various forms which were used for spreading metal or drawing it together during the various operations of making armor. Some of our specimens date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and are part of the Klein-Tachaux Collection which the Museum acquired a few years ago. It may be remarked that an armorer used in his calling hammers of many kinds, a score of types being known, so that an ancient outfit which included examples of various weights of these different types might readily have in it a hundred, or even two hundred hammers. In the second row of the rack appear implements of several sorts. Among these are armorers' pincers, some of them intended for cutting. One of these is a ponderous affair, beautifully wrought and provided with a screw-driver at the end of an arm. There are also calipers, punches for leather, clippers for metal plates, a die for cutting screws, and an ancient hack-saw—the last dating not later than the seventeenth century. At one end of this improvised workshop there is hung an armorer's certificate, a document dating from the eighteenth century, which showed that a certain Christian Wagner was officially recognized as a member of the guild of armorers and could be recommended to do a certain quality of work; he was "true, hard-work-

ing, quiet, and law-abiding." This was issued by the guild at Dresden. On the wall near this certificate is a small statue of St. Eloi, patron of hammer-workers. He is here represented shoeing the horse's foot which he had deliberately chopped from the living beast. The creature, it appears, had been in a furious temper, and otherwise "possessed of a devil," so the saint took this cautious means of accomplishing his work, later performing a miracle in restoring the leg to its place! On either side of this little fifteenth-century figure are hung horseshoeing irons used by sixteenth and seventeenth century smiths, which are not inappropriate in their place, since armorers and blacksmiths, especially in small communities, were not far apart in their craft.

The Gothic woodwork which has been noted above as a frame for the armorer's implements, has, in passing, a second function. It incloses, visible through the doorway, many modern forgeries of armor. These may here be examined, close to the cases containing authentic objects, yet kept

apart from them in an inconspicuous limbo of their own. The false pieces exhibited date mainly from the middle of the nineteenth century: some of them are as early as 1820-30; others are quite recent—*même chaud*, as a French expert put it. It may be explained that the present collection aims to give examples of the work of the best-known copyists and counterfeiters, so that the student may conveniently learn to distinguish the kind of objects which are usually found in the shops, and not infrequently, alas, in museums! The present collection is apparently unique, not as a collection, of course, for several private collections include a ten times more costly series, but as an out-and-out gathering of forgeries, with names of makers, places, and approximate dates—notes, by the way, which have proved by no means easy to gather, since the authors of such objects are not in the habit of signing their work and are otherwise averse to publicity. But the subject of forgeries is a special one and may later be made the theme of an article.

B. D.



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